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ABSTRACT

The schema generally used to describe the linguistic situation in Italy includes two categories: dialetto regionale (regional dialect) and italiano regionale (regional Italian). These stand apart from the widely accepted sociolinguistic model "variety--dialect--language." It is demonstrated that both these categories should be treated simply as dialects, the dialetto regionale an "old" dialect stemming directly from Proto-Romance, and the italiano regionale a "new" dialect resulting from a relatively recent fragmentation of standard (Tuscan) Italian. Should the original Italian dialects ("sister" dialects of Tuscan) die out within a few generations, they will not have vanished entirely: the italiani regionali, continuing some of the old dialects' structural features, may remain and become the Italian dialects of the future. (Author)

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Linguistic Classification in Italy: Problems and Predictions[1]

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The schema generally used to describe the linguistic situation of Italy includes two categories, *dialetto regionale* 'regional dialect' and *italiano regionale* 'regional Italian', that stand apart from the widely accepted sociolinguistic model VARIETY—DIALECT—LANGUAGE. I attempt to demonstrate that both these categories should be treated simply as DIALECTS, the *dialetto regionale* an 'old' dialect stemming directly from Proto-Romance, the *italiano regionale* a 'new' dialect resulting from a relatively recent fragmentation of standard (Tuscan) Italian. Should the original Italian dialects ('sister' dialects of Tuscan) die out within a few generations, they will not have vanished utterly: the *italiani regionali*, continuing some of the old dialects' structural features, may remain and become the Italian dialects of the future.

The general trend in sociolinguistics over the past decades has been to employ three basic categories for linguistic classification: variety, dialect, and language. VARIETIES are determined primarily by structural criteria. The linguist terms a given code a variety if (1) it shows some structural difference from any closely related variety in which he might subsume it; and if (2) it "... is sufficiently homogeneous to be analyzed by available techniques of synchronic description and ... has a sufficiently large repertory of elements and their arrangements or processes with broad enough semantic scope to function in all normal contexts of communication."[2] The decision to extend the title DIALECT to a given variety or group of varieties can also be based on structural criteria; as a general rule, more isoglosses are necessary to define a dialect than a variety. In addition, however, dialect status is associated with certain FUNCTIONS—for example, use in publication (of any sort), local broadcasting, elementary education, church sermons, local and regional public ceremonies. In reality, dialects are defined by the structural and/or the functional criteria;[3] and/or the element of HISTORICITY they may or may not possess for the communities that speak them.[4] As for LANGUAGES, Kloss has noted that they are delimited by two sets of internal factors: (1) ABSTAND "distance"—structural differences from nearest related languages,

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(of a higher order, though of a similar kind, as at the variety and dialect levels); (2) AUSBAU "elaboration"—the effects on the language's structure prompted by its having been ". . . shaped or reshaped, molded or remolded . . . in order to become a standardized tool of literary expression."[5]

At every level of classification, the ideal is the same: to devise entities having the maximum possible homogeneity within themselves, plus the maximum possible heterogeneity from every other entity. But homo- and heterogeneity vary according to the criteria selected. What classification one actually makes will, of course, be dependent upon one's purpose in classifying. There are no "right" or "wrong" categories. However, one investigator may posit classes that will be more useful for her research than those posited by another investigator will be for his.

In the last twenty years, it has become accepted practice in Italian sociolinguistics to recognize certain categories said to stand "between language and dialect."[6] This view is in part illusory, and a consideration of the broader historical perspective may dispel it. I hope that a reanalysis of the situation will lead to a redefinition of the categories, rendering them more useful and enlightening for the linguist and sociolinguist employing them.

Italy contains an amazingly high number of distinct geographical varieties. In some areas, each village has a set of varieties that approach—perhaps even meet—the structural criteria for dialects, though their limited sphere of influence makes it impossible for them even to begin fulfilling the function requirements. But all of them, mere varieties and "ABSTAND-only" dialects alike,[7] are *i dialetti locali* to their speakers; and Italian linguists, no doubt influenced by this usage, have regularly classified these local varieties as *dialetti* despite much research carried out abroad on the significance of function.

What would better qualify as "dialects" according to my criteria are the groups of varieties corresponding rather neatly to the traditional REGIONAL division of Italy—into Veneto, Toscana, Lazio, Sicilia, etc. These fulfill the structural *and* functional requirements of dialects, and moreover have a long history of recognition as units; in fact, they constitute the set of dialects recognized by Dante in his treatise *De vulgari eloquentia*. Many of them—for example, Piedmontese, Sicilian, Umbrian—are DIALECTALIZED LANGUAGES in Kloss's terminology; that is, dialects which once qualified as ABSTAND/AUSBAU languages, but whose speakers have subsequently acquiesced to the imposition of another dialect (in this case, standard Tuscan) as their "language."

Having applied the term *dialetto* to the local varieties, and knowing

full well what was meant by *la lingua*, Italian linguists have been forced to postulate an intermediate area in order to classify these regional types (the "dialects", by my analysis). Of the terms suggested to denote this category, Migliorini's *dialetto regionale* has gained the widest acceptance.[8]

The "twilight zone" has an additional, more significant resident. The Italian national language is MONOCENTRIC; that is, a single norm is recognized as standard. Its speakers are primarily people who grew up speaking the widely varying local varieties, and are, in many cases, more "at home" in them. The result is that most Italians speak Italian—*la lingua*—with an "accent." The output of each region's dialect speakers in attempting to realize the national language is felt to constitute a system of its own; and these systems, one per region, are called *italiano regionale*. Large-scale studies have been done on the Italian of Sicily,[9] Piedmont,[10] and others—as distinct from the DIALECTS of these regions—and even on the Italian of individual towns.[11]

Thus, most sociolinguistic work carried out in Italy is based on a four-level scale: dialect, regional dialect, regional Italian, standard Italian.[12] Figure One presents a single sentence from the semantic view (translation: "I don't know when we'll be able to go to our godfather's house"), and its realization, at each of the four levels, in the Alto-Veneto region. The data are taken from Cortelazzo (1972).[13] At the bottom of Figure One are the data as they appear in the written language; included are lexical and syntactic alternatives that define separate varieties within standard Italian and regional Italian, as indicated on the chart. In addition, two distinct varieties of regional dialect are listed on the basis of phonological differences.

The chart contains the data in phonemic transcription, and is so arranged that we can compare levels syllable by syllable, ascending or descending a given slot and noting at which level a change occurs. These changes are, so to speak, the "isoglosses" one will employ in defining classes.

Figure Two presents the same table, this time with the "isoglosses" boxed and labelled by type (P = phonological, M = morphological, S = syntactic, L = lexical); the chart is to be read from the top down, starting with the varieties in most widespread use (levels 1 and 2) and proceeding to the most narrowly limited (level 7). The number of isoglosses separating the seven varieties cited run as follows:

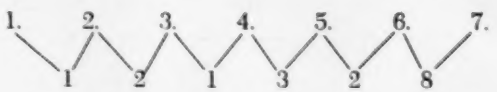

Figure One.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
italiano comune	1.	non	so	kuản	do		po	tré		no	re	kár	či				dal	nǫ́	stro	pa	dri	no
	2.	non	so	kuản	do		po	tré		mo	an	dả	re	ak ka		sa	del	nǫ́	stro	pa	dri	no
italiano regionale	3.	non	so	kuản	do		po	tré		mo	an	dả	re	a	ka	sa	del	nó	stro	sản	to	lo
	4.	non	so	kuản	do	ke	po	tré		mo	an	dả	re	a	ka	sa	del	nó	stro	sản	to	lo
dialetto regionale	5.	no	so	kuản	do	ke	po	da	ré	mo	an	dả		ra	kả	sa	del	no	stro	sản	to	lo
	6.	no	so	kuản	do	ke	po	da	ré	mon		dả		ra	kả	sa	del	no	stro	sản		tol
dialetto locale	7.	no	sai	kản	de	ke	po	da	rón			dzi		ta	čé	sa	del	nóst		sản		tol

'Non so quando (che) potremo { recarci dal / andare a casa del } nostro { padrino / santolo } .'

Figure Two.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
italiano comune	1.	non	so	kuản	do		po	trẹ́		mo	re	kár	či				dal	nǫ́	stro	pa	dri	no
											L→						←L					
	2.	non	so	kuản	do		po	trẹ́		mo	an	dả	re	ak	ka	sa	del	nǫ́	stro	pa	dri	no
														P						L		
italiano regionale	3.	non	so	kuản	do		po	tré		mo	an	dả	re	a	ka	sa	del	nó	stro	sản	to	lo
						S																
	4.	non	so	kuản	do	ke	po	trė		mo	an	dả	re	a	ka	sa	del	nó	stro	sản	to	lo
		P						P/M						P								
dialetto regionale	5.	no	so	kuản	do	ke	po	da	rė	mo	an	dả	(→)	ra	kả	sa	del	no	stro	sản	to	lo
												P										P
	6.	no	so	kuản	do	ke	po	da	rė	mon	(←)	dả		ra	kả	sa	del	no	stro	sản	(→)	tol
			M	P	P				M			L		L	P			P→		←P		
dialetto locale	7.	no	sai	kản	de	ke	po	da	rọn	(←)		dzi		ta	čé	sa	del	nóst	(←)	sản		tol

' Non so quando (che) potremo { recarci dal / andare a casa del } nostro { padrino / santolo } .'

Of course, one cannot determine dialect divisions on the basis of a single sentence, but consider the present example. Between levels 2 and 3, there is a larger number of isoglosses than between 1 and 2 or between 3 and 4; a break between 2 and 3 thus seems appropriate. The same situation induces one to make a break between levels 4 and 5. Finally, the large number of isoglosses found at level 7 indicates that this variety should be set apart from the others. A glance at the four-way division originally posited for these varieties in Figures One and Two will reveal that it is substantiated by the analysis just undertaken.

If we accept, then, that we are indeed dealing with four separate entities; and if, in general, we classify the "local dialects" as varieties or ABSTAND-only dialects, the "regional dialects" as dialects or dialectalized languages, and "standard Italian" as a language—then what do we do with "regional Italian"?

It should be noted that numerous varieties of *français régional* as well have long been recognized, and a recent investigator has attempted to apply the four-level Italian system to Francophone territories.[14] It is interesting that both Italian and French are rigidly monocentric languages—in fact, the only monocentric Romance languages.[15] This suggests that the "regional language" phenomenon may be the inevitable concomitant of a monocentric lanuage that is spread over wide, scattered areas (French) or over one area characterized by strong linguistic diversity (Italian); in each place it is taken, it evolves differently. The result is a Québec French, Calabrian Italian, et al., that still recognize Parisian and Tuscan norms.

But the process just described consists of the same chain of events that produces a POLYCENTR ⊃ language, such as English, with separate American, Australian, British, Canadian, Irish, New Zealander, and Scottish (and perhaps Indian) norms,[16] or Spanish, which has a continental norm and several South American ones. The sole difference is in the ATTITUDES of the speakers concerned. Anglophones and Hispanophones speak polycentrically languages they acknowledge to be polycentric; Francophones and Italophones speak polycentrically languages they insist must be monocentric.

How, then, should we classify the *italiani regionali* and *français régionaux*? Simple: they are dialects. They do not meet the "language" criteria, but more than fulfill those for dialects. It is quite possible for the people of a given Italian village to have simultaneously in their repertoires an ABSTAND-only local dialect; the "real" dialect (coterminous with the region); and this third dialect, based lexically and

grammatically on standard Italian, but with dialectal traits—perhaps even the entire dialectal phonological system.

Italian linguists may feel that an important distinction is blurred by lumping these two very different entities, one dialect-based, the other Italian-based, into the same category; but that is where they belong, structurally and functionally. If it is necessary to make a distinction—call *dialetti regionali* "old dialects" and *italiani regionali* "new dialects." The intention will become clearer after a glance at the linguistic history of the Iberian peninsula.

What we call "the Spanish language" is, at base, the dialect of the Castilian region. This and the other dialects of the central peninsula—Leonese, Asturian, Aragonese—had been developing for fourteen hundred years from the Proto-Romance brought by the Roman invaders, when they began to undergo their initial literary elaboration some eight centuries ago. At this time, the south of the peninsula was still in the hands of Muslim invaders. The Castilians were destined to lead the *reconquista* of the south, and their dialect was the one established there with the resettlement. The Andalusian dialect, therefore, began its separate existence only in the fourteenth century; and if we employ the genetic metaphor, it is a "daughter" dialect of Castilian. On the other hand, the Asturian dialect of northern Spain dates from the original Roman conquest and is a "sister" dialect of Castilian. Martinet has suggested that we term Asturian a "Spanish" dialect, Andalusian a "Castilian" dialect.[17]

This is precisely the same distinction the Italian linguists make with their *dialetti regionali* and *italiani regionali*; for these two types stand in a sister/daughter relationship with standard (Tuscan) Italian identical to that of Asturian and Andalusian with Castilian Spanish. Adapting Martinet's proposal, we might call the *dialetti regionali* "Italian" dialects, the *italiani regionali* "Tuscan" (better: "*neo*-Tuscan") dialects; or simply "old" and "new" dialects, as I suggested above.

It may be that Italy today is in the same linguistic state as it was following the rise of Rome and the spread of Latin; we may presume that the "sister" Italic dialects—Oscan, Umbrian, etc.—continued for a period, alongside various types of "regional Latin" whose structure Oscan, Umbrian, etc., influenced. In time, the Italic dialects died out, but these "regional Latins," bearing their traces, continued on and developed into the modern "Italian dialects."

At present the Italian dialects are in demise; their conqueror is the Italian language. Its weapons: television, radio, movies, paperback

books, national magazines, internal migration, and compulsory education. It cannot be predicted whether or when the present Italian dialects (*dialetti locali* and *regionali*) will cease to be spoken; in certain places, they appear about to die with the oldest inhabitants; elsewhere, movements of resuscitation seem to be gaining a real foothold. In language, anything is possible and the anticipated rarely arrives. Even if the local and regional dialects become extinct within a few generations, they will not have disappeared entirely. New dialects, continuing some of the old traits, will emerge, following the successful spread of Tuscan. In fact, they are emerging already, and are being used by more people in more functions every day. The Italian dialects of the future may well be the "neo-Tuscan" dialects—*gli italiani regionali*.

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SUNTO

Lo schema in uso generale per descrivere la situazione linguistica italiana comprende due categorie, 'dialetto regionale' e 'italiano regionale', che si adattano difficilmente al sistema sociolinguistico generale VARIETÀ, DIALETTO, LINGUA. Provo di mostrare che queste categorie dovrebbero considerarsi tutt'e due DIALETTI, l'uno un 'vecchio' dialetto a base del proto-romanzo, l'altro un 'nuovo' dialetto a base dell'italiano standard (toscano). Se i dialetti italiani si estingueranno fra qualche generazione, non saranno completamente scomparsi: gli 'italiani regionali', continuando dei loro tratti, resteranno e diventeranno i dialetti italiani dell'avvenire.

RESUMO

La ĝenerale uzata plano, per kiu oni priskribas la italan lingvosituacion, entenas du kategoriojn, "regiona dialekto" kaj "regiona itala lingvo". Tiu enkategoriigo estas malfacile adaptebla al la kutima socilingvistika sistemo, kiu distingas inter *variaĵo*, *dialekto* kaj *lingvo*. La aŭtoro provas pruvi, ke ambaŭ kutimaj kategorioj devus esti traktataj kiel *dialektoj*. Unu el ili estas "malnova" dialekto bazita sur la protolatinida lingvo, la alia estas "nova" dialekto bazita sur la norma itala lingvo (la toska). Se la italaj dialektoj estingiĝos post kelkaj generacioj, ili ne tute malaperos. La "regionaj italaj lingvoj", kiuj daurigos iliajn trajtojn, restos kaj iĝos la italaj dialektoj de la estonteco.

NOTES

1. Portions of this article are based on a lecture given by the author at Harvard University on February 19, 1980, entitled "Dialetto e lingua in Italia: Aspetti sincronici e storici."

2. Ferguson and Gumperz 1960, p. 3.

3. However, the linguist attempting to determine groupings within a given span of varieties based on strictly structural criteria should refer to the resultant units not as dialects but as DIASYSTEMS. (Weinreich 1954, p. 389–390; Pulgram 1964).

4. See Stewart 1968, p. 535–536; Fishman 1971, p. 230.

5. Kloss 1967, p. 29.

6. The title of Pellegrini 1960 translated.

7. (Kloss 1978, p. 25–26) Kloss applies the terms ABSTAND and NUR-ABSTAND at the *language* level only. Again, the structural criteria brought to bear at the dialect and variety levels differ only in degree, not in kind.

8. (Migliorini 1963, p. 81) Others are *koiné dialettale* (Pellegrini 1960, p. 138, fn. 1), and *dialectal Italian* (Cardona 1976, p. 3).

9. Leone 1959.

10. Clivio 1970.

11. Pautasso 1969; Quaresima 1962.

12. So, for example, Berruto (1971 and 1977), Cardona (1976), Cortelazzo (1972), Galli de'Paratesi (1977), Migliorini (1963), Pellegrini (1960). Canepari (1975, p. 474), however, proposes a *six*-level distinction that differs from the "standard" four-way scale only in its separation of "regional Italian" into three levels, according to how deeply they have been infused with dialectal elements.

Mioni and Trumper (1977) use a *continuum* model to deal with the language/dialect situation in the Veneto region. This method merely begs the question. We all know that language—every language—is spoken in innumerable idiosyncratic varieties that do, in fact, constitute a continuum. The linguist's primary task is to form classes—that is, generalizations—out of what he finds within the continuum; in fact, this is the function of all science. Only after reasonable generalizations have been formed can one begin to determine the internal mechanism of the continuum.

13. Cortelazzo 1972, p. 11.

14. Baldinger 1975.

15. The status of Romanian is arguable; but according to Kloss (1967, p. 31), Romanian and Moldavian constitute a single ABSTAND/AUSBAU language with two distinct norms—hence, BIOCENTRIC.

16. On the problem of "Indian English", see Prator (1968).

17. Martinet 1954, p. 4.

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